

ECREA 2021

Diaspora, migration and the media

Abstract – Performative refugeeeness: critiquing voice, recognition and participation through creative mediation

This paper will seek to discuss how participatory creative practice might facilitate acts of citizenship – the enactment of cultural citizenship by those without formal legal and political citizenship rights. It situates this practice as critical alternative media to provide a platform for voice and recognition by asylum seekers in the UK. The work focused on two sites, Bensham in Gateshead (England, UK) and Splott in Cardiff (Wales, UK), chosen for their status within Dispersal Areas – areas in which asylum seekers arriving to the UK are rehoused by the British government. Working with a range of participants, focusing on a core of 12 case studies, the project engaged in participatory storytelling sessions and produced a diverse abundance of material, which was exhibited in both cities. This material included fiction, oral history, letter writing, digital storytelling, group storytelling, drawing, and collage. Drawing on a multimethod approach, which combines ethnography and discourse analysis in the context of action research, this paper reveals the forms in which dominant discourses of exclusion around asylum become challenged but also appropriated and rearticulated among asylum seekers. As will be shown, participants constructed identities of exclusion along the lines of normative discourses of Otherness and deservedness, as revealed through their production of media texts projecting imagined and tangible desires and fears. At the same time, they challenged exclusionary discourses of citizenship and rights through acts of solidarity and mutual recognition which were often approved of within the socioeconomic contexts in which these texts were produced. This data will be discussed through its implications for understanding acts of citizenship in the context of highly regulated regimes of asylum and migration.

Biography

Rob Sharp is a Lecturer at the University of Sussex and PhD researcher at the London School of Economics.